Food Matters: What We Waste and How We Can Expand the Amount of Food We Rescue

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https://www.nrdc.org/resources/food-matters-what-we-waste-and-how-we-can-expand-amount-food-we-rescue

NRDC Reports on Wasted Food

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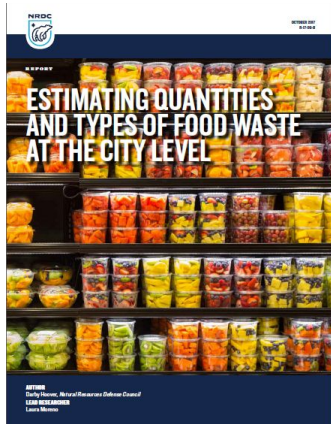
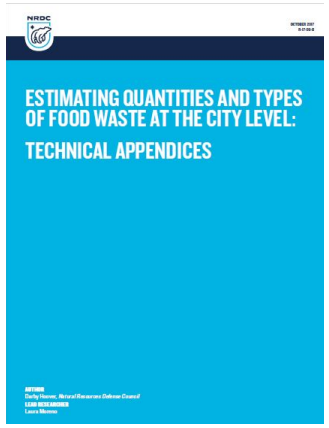
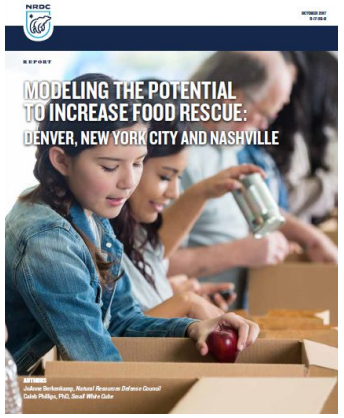
Baseline Food Waste





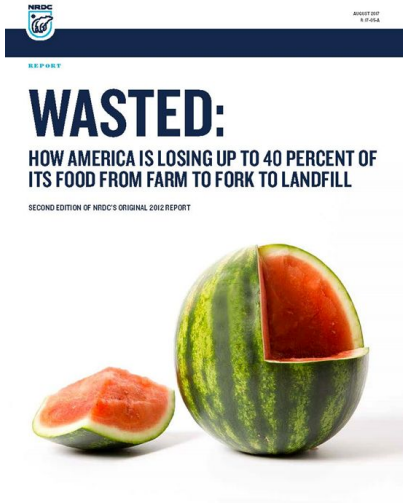
Rescue Potential



Case Studies

Other Resources

SAVETHEFOOD.COM



Data Gaps In Food Waste Measurement

What is actually being wasted in households?

- Little direct measurement in U.S. at household level
- Very little detail by food type, edibility, or loss reason
- Focus on landfilled food waste (little focus on drain disposal)
- Lack of consistency across measurement studies

Understanding what, how much, why, and where it goes is critical to understanding behavior, designing interventions, and tracking improvement

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Baseline Food Waste Assessment

Objectives:

- Assess how much food is going to waste in commercial and residential sectors in Denver, Nashville, and NYC, including characteristics of residential food wasted (e.g. reasons for waste, discard destinations, types of food wasted, edibility).
- Contribute to working model for other cities to perform similar assessments and to inspire initiatives to address wasted food.

Methodology:

Residential (613 households):

- Kitchen Diaries – How much, what, why, where food was discarded: one week
- Bin Digs – Sampled trash from randomly selected households (277)
- Surveys – One before and one after kitchen diary

Industrial, Commercial, Institutional (ICI):

- Estimates – Formulas for each sector + regional facility data
- Bin Digs – Sampled trash/compost from a variety of sectors (145)

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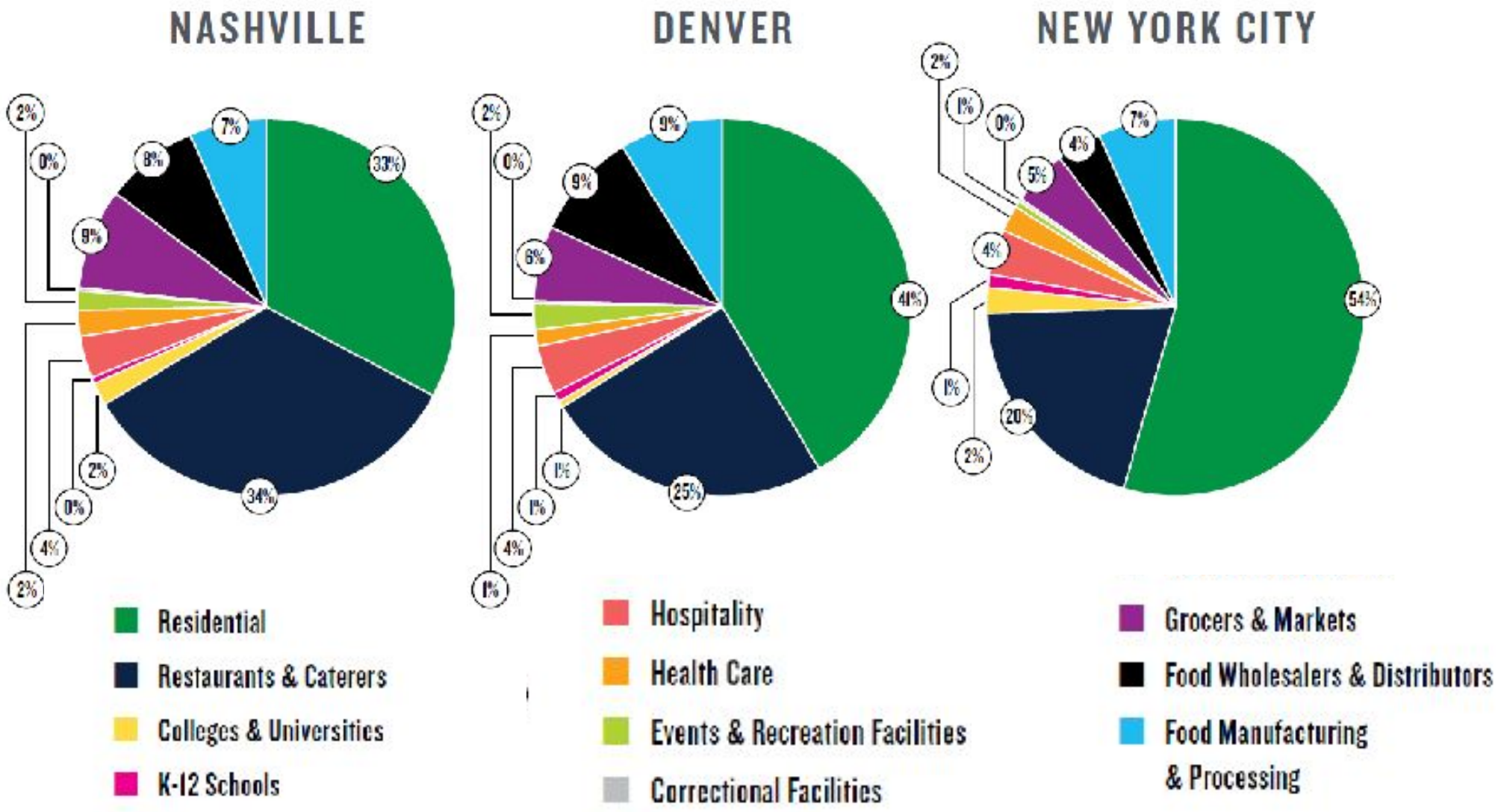
Estimated Food Waste Generated by Sector



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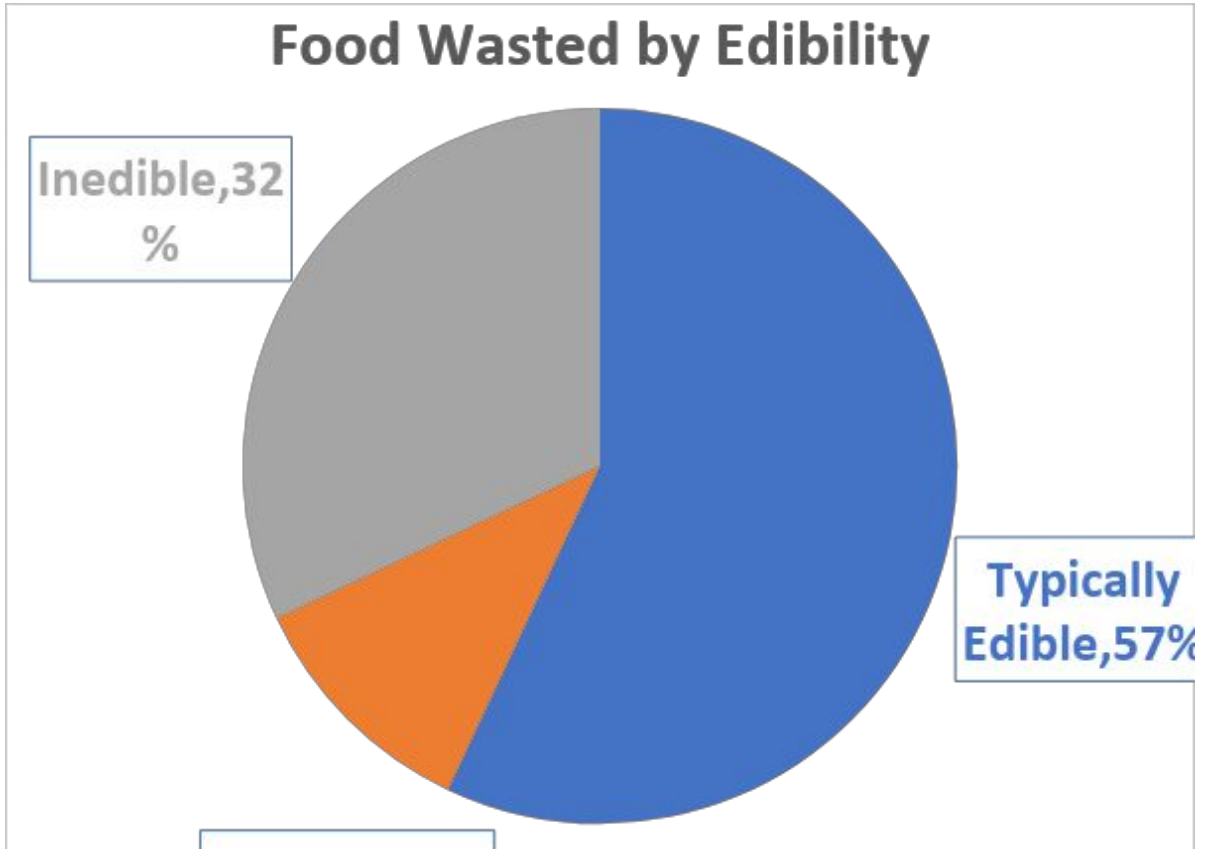
How Much Food is Wasted (Residential)

68% of food discarded was potentially edible

(includes "questionably edible" items such as beet greens, carrot peels, potato peels, and other items that are technically edible, but may not be eaten based on preference or culture)

- Average **Total** Food Wasted Per Capita = **3.5 lbs/week**

- Average **Edible** Food Wasted Per Capita = **2.5 lbs/week**



What Types of Food are Wasted (Residential)

Most wasted categories:

- Inedible – 31%
- Fruits and vegetables – 27%
- Prepared food/leftovers – 19%

Items included in top 10 most wasted **total** for all cities (edible + inedible):

Coffee
Banana
Chicken
Milk
Apple
Bread
Potato

Items included in top 10 most wasted **edible** for all cities (typically edible + questionably edible):

Coffee
Milk
Apple
Bread
Potato
Pasta

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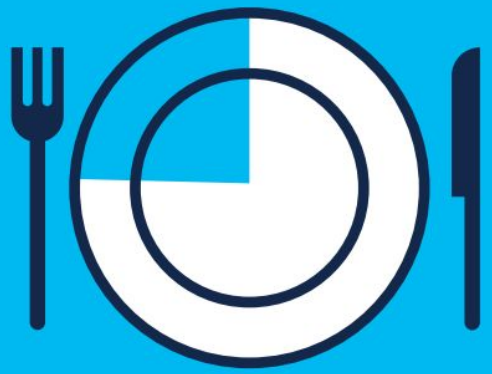
76%

believe they throw out less food than the average American

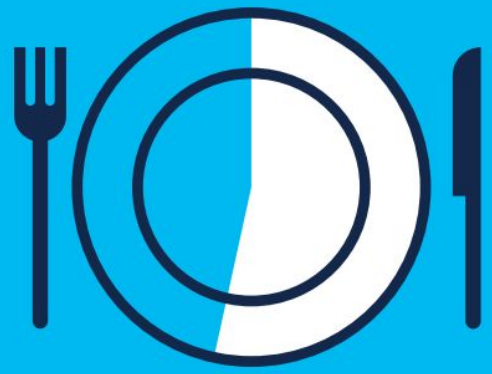


70%

believe changing behavior would reduce food waste in their home a little or not at all

58%

feel less guilty about wasting food if it is composted



Wasting food occurs across all demographics

- Smaller households waste more food
- Income, education, ethnicity, amount spent on food, etc. mostly do not relate to amount of food wasted

Rescue Potential

1. How big is the as yet **untapped supply** of surplus, potentially rescuable food from retailers, restaurants and institutions located within Denver, Nashville, and NYC?

2. If each city realized that potential, how far could it go in addressing unmet food needs among its residents as reflected in county **meal gap** data?

3. What investments in rescue and distribution **infrastructure** would be needed to realize that potential?

HYPOTHETICALLY, UP TO

68 million

MORE MEALS COULD BE DONATED PER YEAR
IN DENVER, NASHVILLE, AND NEW YORK COMBINED

EXPANDED FOOD RESCUE EFFORTS WITHIN EACH CITY
COULD POTENTIALLY HELP MEET AN ADDITIONAL

46%
IN DENVER

48%
IN NASHVILLE

23%
IN NEW YORK

ANNUAL FOOD NEEDS

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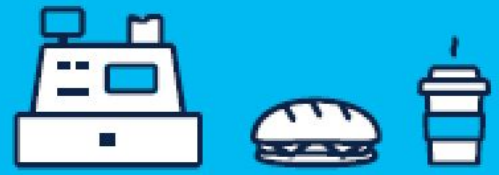
21 MILLION | Meals from retail grocery stores

20 MILLION | Meals from hospitality, healthcare, and education

17 MILLION | Meals from full-service and limited -service restaurants

10 MILLION | Meals from convenience stores and other consumer-facing businesses



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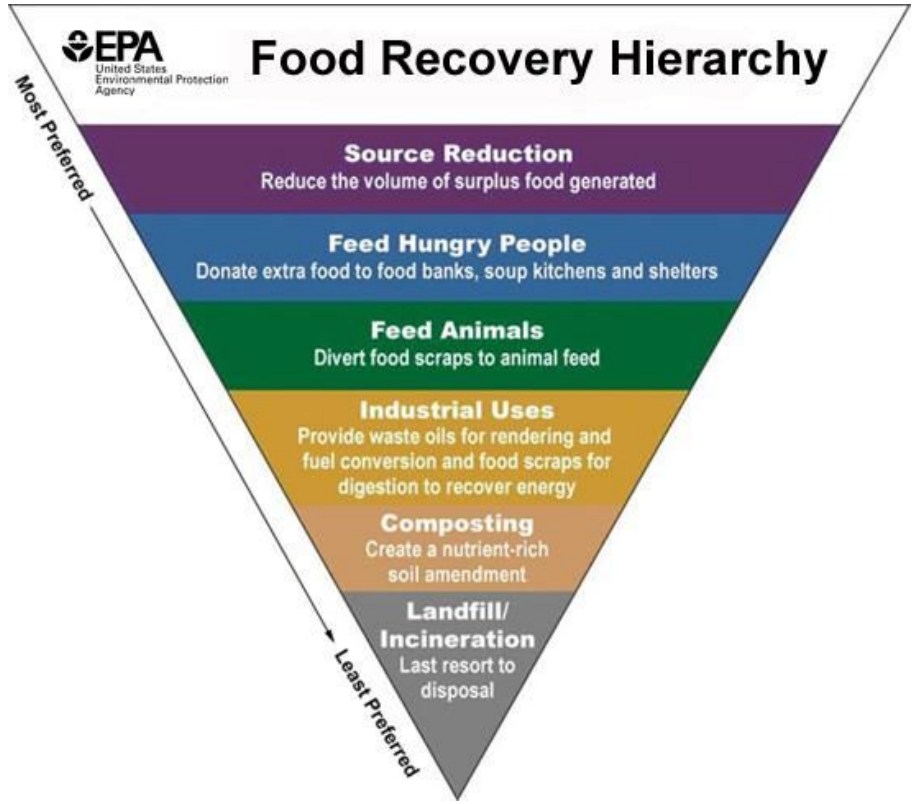
Recommendations for Cities

- Conduct city-wide baseline food waste and food rescue assessments
- Match ICI sector baseline food waste data with city goals to direct efforts most effectively to reduce waste and leverage city resources
- Educate residents on the scale of the problem of wasting food and contribution of consumers, as well as on how to waste less food (including tips on shopping, storing, cooking, and composting)
- Prioritize prevention in setting policies and allocating resources to programs
- Composting programs should incorporate messaging about the importance of preventing wasted food



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